



PARENT GUIDE:

Sexting & Online Safety

- WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW •
- WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW •
- WHEN TO GET HELP •

Sexting can become a safety, bullying, exploitation, and legal issue.



WHAT IS SEXTING?

Sexting is the sending, receiving, or forwarding of sexually explicit messages or images through text messages, video, social media applications, email, webcams, or other internet-based platforms.

Although sexting may appear harmless when it occurs between consenting adults, it can have serious consequences when minors are involved. It can also be connected to bullying, harassment, blackmail, exploitation, and other safety concerns.

Important: It is against the law for anyone, including a minor, to send sexually explicit or suggestive images of a person under 18. This can include images of the sender, the recipient, or another minor.

WHAT PARENTS MAY THINK

- ▶ My child knows better and would never do that.
- ▶ I check my child's phone, so I would know if they were engaging in it.
- ▶ Only promiscuous kids do that.
- ▶ I talk to my child, and they would tell me if they were sexting.
- ▶ My child does not even think about sex yet.
- ▶ My child is too young to sext.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE MAY THINK

- ▶ It is just flirting.
- ▶ What is the big deal? Everybody does it.
- ▶ They love me; I know they will not share it.
- ▶ They will think I am attractive when they see this picture.
- ▶ If I do not send this, they will break up with me.
- ▶ If they did not want people to see it, they would not have sent it.

SEXTING IS A SAFETY ISSUE

Images Can Spread

Once a photo or video is shared with another person or posted online, control of that image can be lost. Images may be forwarded, reposted, used for bullying, shared after a breakup, used as blackmail, or posted to embarrass or harm someone. Once an image is online, removing every copy may be difficult or impossible.

Sextortion

Sexual images can be used to manipulate or coerce a person into providing money, additional images, sexual activity, or other actions. This is commonly referred to as sextortion. Images may be obtained through sharing, hacking, compromised accounts, webcams, or another person distributing an image.

Children should know that if someone threatens, pressures, or blackmails them over an image, they should stop communicating with that person and immediately tell a trusted adult. A

mistake does not mean they have to handle the situation alone.

Possible Consequences

Sharing sexual images involving minors can have consequences well beyond the original message or post, including:

- ▶ Criminal or legal consequences
- ▶ School disciplinary consequences
- ▶ Bullying or cyberbullying
- ▶ Harassment
- ▶ Blackmail or sextortion
- ▶ Loss of privacy
- ▶ Damage to relationships or reputation
- ▶ Emotional distress
- ▶ Images continuing to circulate long after they were originally shared

TALK WITH YOUR CHILD

Use age- and developmentally appropriate language when talking with your child. The goal should be an open conversation rather than a one-time lecture. These conversations are most effective when they happen regularly.

- ▶ What sexting is and why it is a safety issue.
- ▶ Sexual images may be used to bully, blackmail, manipulate, or exploit someone.
- ▶ Once an image is sent or posted, it cannot truly be taken back.
- ▶ Images that are shared often spread beyond the intended recipient.
- ▶ There may be legal consequences for creating, possessing, sending, or forwarding sexual images involving minors.
- ▶ There can be long-term personal, social, emotional, educational, and reputational consequences.
- ▶ Sending sexual images is not necessary to maintain a relationship.
- ▶ Predators exist online, and accounts, cloud storage, or devices can be compromised.
- ▶ Never forward a sexual image received from someone else, including an image that has gone viral.
- ▶ If your child has already sent or shared an image, make sure they know they can tell you. Focus first on their safety and on getting appropriate help.

TEXAS LAW

Texas law addresses several types of conduct involving minors, electronic communications, intimate images, and obscene material. Parents and students should understand that conduct involving sexual images may have legal consequences.

- ▶ Soliciting a minor online for sexual contact or sexual communication.
- ▶ Pretending to be another person online, without that person's consent, with the intent to harm or threaten that person.
- ▶ A minor engaging in, promoting, possessing, or sending sexual images depicting minors.
- ▶ Sending electronic visual material showing sexual conduct or exposed intimate parts when the material was not requested or consented to by the recipient.
- ▶ Possessing or promoting obscene material that appears to depict a child younger than 18, including certain computer-generated, artificial intelligence, cartoon, or animated depictions.

If your child is a victim, do not let concern about the law prevent you from seeking help. Law enforcement can investigate the circumstances and may be able to help limit the continued spread of images.

THINK BEFORE YOU SEND OR SHARE

Make sure your child understands:

- ▶ You lose control of an image once you send it.
- ▶ A private message can become public very quickly.
- ▶ Deleting an image does not mean every copy is gone.
- ▶ Never forward a sexual image of another student.
- ▶ Never respond to threats or blackmail by sending more images or money.
- ▶ Tell a trusted adult. Tell a parent, school official, law enforcement officer, or another trusted adult if someone pressures, threatens, or blackmails you.

IF YOUR CHILD TELLS YOU SOMETHING HAPPENED

- ▶ Stay calm and listen before reacting.
- ▶ Let your child know they did the right thing by telling you.
- ▶ Do not forward, copy, or redistribute the image.
- ▶ Preserve relevant information such as usernames, messages, account names, or other details without unnecessarily sharing the image.
- ▶ Contact the school when the situation involves students, school activities, bullying, threats, or another campus safety concern.
- ▶ Contact law enforcement when your child is being threatened, exploited, blackmailed, sexually solicited, or when sexual images involving minors are being distributed.
- ▶ Seek appropriate professional support if your child is struggling emotionally after the incident.

REPORTING A CONCERN

Coppell ISD uses STOPit, an app and web-based system, to allow students, parents, teachers, and the community to anonymously report cyber-bullying, threats of violence, misconduct, self-harm concerns, or other safety issues.

STOPit is not an emergency response service. If a situation requires an immediate police, fire, or paramedic response, call 9-1-1. STOPit does not provide counseling or clinical advice. If counseling or medical assistance is needed, seek help from an appropriate qualified professional.

IN AN EMERGENCY, ALWAYS CALL 9-1-1