



Tips For Parents

- Talk to kids about the messages they are sending and the impressions they are making.
- Make sure they know the law and are aware of the short-term and long-term consequences of their actions in cyberspace.
- Help them understand their messages are not truly private and that those messages may be forwarded to people they do not know.
- Know who kids are communicating with online and on their phones.
- Monitor what kids are texting and posting on social networking sites. This is not an invasion of their privacy; this is good parenting.
- Set clear expectations about what is and is not appropriate behavior.
- Give kids tools to stand up to peer pressure.

Teens may see sexting as a way to be cool or flirtatious, or give a “present” to a boyfriend or girlfriend. In reality, creating, having or sending sexual images of a person under age 18 violates child pornography laws and can seriously impact the lives of those involved.



a message from
Lapeer County Prosecutor
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SEXTING:

Technology & the Law



What is Sexting?

Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photos to another person using a cell phone or other electronic device. Sexting is relatively new among teens and young adults, but is increasing rapidly around the country. According to a survey by the Associated Press and MTV, 30% of people ages 14-24 have engaged in sexting that involved viewing or sending naked pictures, and 29% report receiving other messages with sexual words or images.

The Law

In Michigan a sexually explicit image of a person under the age of 18 is child pornography. The act of creating, possessing, soliciting, or distributing child pornography is a felony, no matter how old the sender, recipient, or possessor is. Penalties range up to twenty years in prison and twenty-five years on the Sex Offender Registry.

It is also a crime to display inappropriate material to a person under the age of 17, with a maximum penalty of two years in prison. The high frequency of sexting is bringing more teens and young adults into the criminal justice system as police take a firmer stance against cyber crimes.

Why are Teens Sexting?

The increase of sexting is rooted in peer pressure. More than 51% of teen girls say that they send sexual messages because of pressure from guys. One quarter of teens of both genders say that they send these messages because of pressure from friends.

The Risks

Even if sexting does not result in criminal action, it can have serious personal consequences. No text, e-mail, or post is truly private. Forty percent of teens and young adults say they have seen a sexually suggestive message that was meant for someone else. Another 20% say that they have shared such an image with someone other than the person for whom it was originally meant, and 55% of those teens admit to forwarding the image to more than one person.

Once something has been sent or posted in cyberspace, it is impossible to take



back. Potential employers, college recruiters, parents and even strangers — including sex offenders — may be able to see posts and images. Even deleted images are often recoverable, and there is no way to know who copied, saved, or forwarded the image before it was deleted. People should be especially cautious about sharing things with those they meet online, as online profile information may not be true. Additionally, even with only an e-mail address or phone number, an online acquaintance may be able to find a person at home or school.

There is also a risk that these messages will be misunderstood. Many teen girls who have sent sexually explicit content say they did so jokingly, but 29% of teen boys agree that girls who send such content are expected to date or “hook up” in real life.

Overall, it is just not worth the risks. Sexting can result in criminal prosecution or otherwise negatively impact a young person for the rest of his or her life. Join the effort to end sexting.

*Statistics are from The Associated Press and MTV, *A Thin Line*, and The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, *Sex and Tech*.