

Teens and Texting

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When teenagers ask for cell phones, they usually want the coolest, trendiest cell phone on the market. These days, that phone will have photo and video capabilities.

Put that together with the unlimited text messaging plan that your teen is sure to beg for and here comes possible trouble. Silly photos and embarrassing videos aside, cameras and texting have given young people a new and potentially dangerous way to explore their curiosity: sexting.

Sexting is the exchange of sexually suggestive or nude images between minors via cell phone. For example, a girl might take a nude picture of herself and send it to her boyfriend. Her boyfriend may forward the picture to one or two friends, who then decide to forward the picture to others. In this way, the girl's picture could travel between many phones and have countless viewers in a very short period of time.

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, "1 in 6 teens (ages 12-17) with a cell phone have received a sexually suggestive image or video of someone they know."

Help protect children from sexting

- Before buying your child a cell phone, set rules for its use, including what sort of information and images are appropriate to share via text.
- Know what safeguards are available on your child's phone, such as turning off and/or blocking texting and picture features.
- Talk to your child about the possible consequences of sexting. They could face humiliation, lose educational opportunities, and get in trouble with the law.
- Encourage your child to not be a bystander or an instigator. If he or she receives a "sext," discuss why it is important that he or she not forward the image to anyone else.
- Remind your child that they can talk to you if they receive a nude picture on their cell phone.
- Report any nude or semi-nude images that your child receives to law enforcement or contact www.cybertipline.com.