

THE DANGERS OF SEXTING

Before we can get into the dangers of Sexting, let's make sure you really know what this is. According to Wikipedia, Sexting is , "the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones."

Most people aren't aware of the dangers really involved when sending a sexually explicit picture through their phone or the Internet. Over the past several years, the number of people Sexting has increased while the ages of those people creating the sexually explicit images and videos have decreased. Take a look at an example provided by PEOPLE magazine in 2009:

"On a typical day Ben Hunt and his best friend John Eicher, both 14, send each other about a dozen routine text messages. But on Jan. 15, while at school, Hunt sent Eicher something on his cell phone that suddenly put their futures in peril: a photo of a girl in their class exposing a breast. Eicher didn't see it as a big deal. 'I really didn't think of deleting it,' says Eicher, an eighth grader who at the same time attended the Lawrence School in Falmouth, Mass., with Hunt. 'I was, like, whatever.'



But school officials, alerted to the photo by two students sprang into action. They seized Hunt's phone, and the police arrived. It turned out the photo had been taken by another male student of his 13-year-old girlfriend, who had allegedly posed for the shot. The fact that both boys had received the picture unsolicited, and that Eicher had done nothing more than open the file, didn't matter. To the shock of the boys and their families, authorities initially said they were weighing whether to charge the teens and four other boys who had received the photo with trafficking in child pornography, meaning they could face jail time and having to register as sex offenders."

The dangers of Sexting aren't always well known and when you find out about them, it may be too late. That is why it is important to get in the know-

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how now. Sexting is something that is being taken very seriously and in order to combat the negativity that comes from Sexting, law enforcement officials around the nation are taking the necessary steps to prevent these situations from happening in the future.

The consequences of Sexting are severe and could either ruin a reputation or a life. Look at this next example, provided by Today at msnbc.com, of a girl who sent a naked picture of herself over her phone:

“Hope Witsell was just beginning the journey from child to teen. The middle-school student had a tight-knit group of friends, the requisite poster of “Twilight” heartthrob Robert Pattinson and big plans to become a landscaper when she grew up.

But one impetuous move robbed Hope of her childhood, and eventually, her life. The 13-year-old Florida girl sent a topless photo of herself to a boy in hope of gaining his attention. Instead, she got the attention of her school, as well as the high school nearby.

The incessant bullying by classmates that followed when the photo spread put an emotional weight upon Hope that she ultimately could not bear.

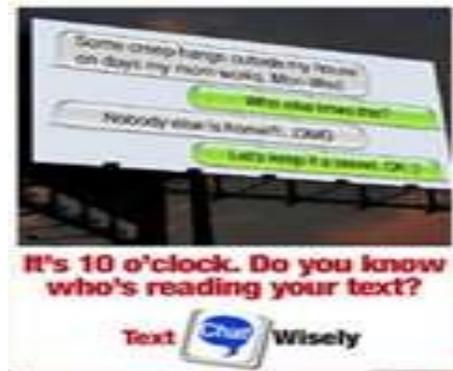


Hope Witsell hanged herself in her bedroom 11 weeks ago [2009].”

What happened to Hope is sadly a recurring theme among the youth of today. That is why it is so important to know how to prevent Sexting and what to do if a “sext” is ever received. The first, and probably most important, step in seeing if your child is experiencing some online drama is by starting a dialogue between you and your child. NetSmartz.org recommends asking questions like, “Have you ever sent or received a sexual message or naked picture on your phone?” This is a good first step, but it is also important to let your kids know what to do if they ever come across content like this. Follow these guidelines, from NetSmartz.org, to keep your kids safer on the Internet:

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1. Think of the consequences of texting or forwarding a sexy image of someone underage, even if it's a picture of you.
2. Don't take pictures of yourself that you wouldn't want everyone—your teachers, classmates and family members—to see.
3. Before you hit send, remember you cannot control where the image might travel. So, if you're thinking of sending something scandalous to a boyfriend or girlfriend, think of the potential people that it could be forwarded to as a result.
4. If you forward a sexual picture of someone underage, you are just as guilty as the original sender.



5.

Report any nude images you may receive to an adult you trust so they can make a report to local law enforcement or the CyberTipline at www.cybertipline.org.

These are good first steps, but as a parent, you should think about each of your children individually. Give them a phone based on their own personalities, the responsibilities they've shown and the communication level between you.

Remember, Sexting can be a serious offense, so make sure you and your children are informed and know how to avoid the potential consequences of this act in the future.

