

Understanding Sexting

Definition and Legal Status

Sexting is when someone shares sexual, naked or semi naked images or videos of themselves or others or sends sexually explicit messages. They can be sent using mobiles, tablets, smartphones, laptops etc – any device that allows you to share media and messages. It is also referred to as 'youth produced sexual imagery'.

'Sexting' does not include the sharing of sexual photos and videos of under-18-year-olds with or by adults. This is a form of child sexual abuse and must be referred to the police.

Sexting may also be called 'trading nudes', 'dirties' or 'pic for pic'. The creating or sharing of explicit images of a child is illegal, even if the person doing it is a child.

In the UK the age of consent for sexual intercourse is 16. However, it is an offence to make, distribute, possess or show any indecent images of anyone aged under 18, even if the content was created with the consent of that young person. The law is contained in Section 1 Protection of Children Act 1978.

If you are under 18, it is against the law to: **take, have or distribute a sexual photo**; this includes a selfie. have or pass on indecent images of someone under 18. encourage or incite someone to take or send 'sexts' take a photo of their own genitals whether the image is shared on or not.

Find Related Guidance

Department of Education offer a [range of guidance](#) for parents, teachers and young people. There is significant guidance and resources on this subject, which is updated yearly. - Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people. Guidance on responding to incidents and safeguarding children and young people.

TOP TIP CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) Command enables anyone worried about online sexual abuse or the way that someone has been communicating with them online to make a report to one of CEOP's Child Protection Advisors