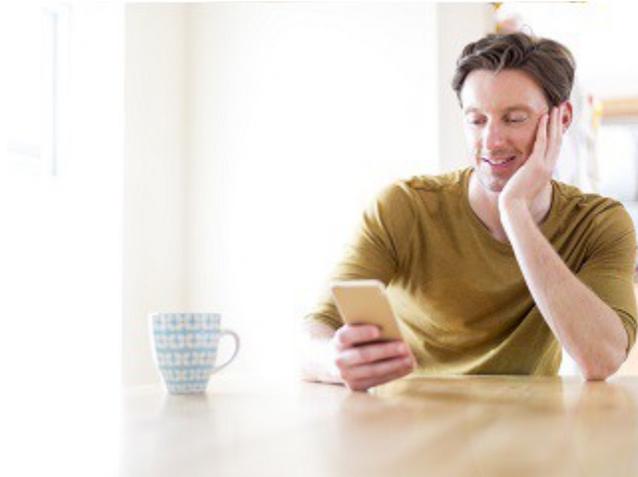


## Protecting God's Children for Adults

# Talking about Sexting with Children and Young People

By [Robert Hugh Farley, M.S.](#)



### Introduction

If one searches the word, "sexting" in Google, one instantly finds over 30,000,000 results ranging from guides such as: *How to Sext—The Ultimate Sexting Guide to Emoji Sexting Tricks*. Although the word sexting seems to have been around for quite a while, it was only in 2012 that sexting was first defined by *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* as the sending of sexually explicit messages or images by

cellphone.

In their *NetSmartz* online safety program, the *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* organization defines sexting as the sharing and receiving of sexually explicit messages, and nude or partially nude images or video via a cellphone. The sexts can be sent as regular text messages or through a variety of online apps.

Unfortunately, sexting images or videos with a smartphone or tablet is a very dangerous technology-facilitated activity for children, teens and even some adults.

### Background

In the past, online child molesters would typically ask a potential victim for innocuous photos such as those from home or taken at a school event. For example, as the grooming process continued, the molester would send sexually explicit photos of himself or would expose himself to the victim using a webcam. At this point, the molester would tell the victim that he loved her and would suggest that as an expression of her love, she should return sexually explicit photos of herself; or, if she truly loved him she should expose herself to him in real time using a webcam.

Today, children and teens taking selfies with a smartphone and utilizing the numerous social media apps such as *Snapchat*, *Kik* or *WhatsApp* have made this type of risky activity much easier. Unfortunately, young people do not comprehend that once a digital image has made its way onto the Internet, it is often floating around there forever.

## **Reasons Teens Sext**

Teens engage in sexting images for different reasons. Girls often feel pressure from friends to sext and are more likely to do so than boys. Some girls are trying to impress a boyfriend, show off or just be funny. Other girls have been manipulated by an offender into sending multiple nude images of themselves, which is referred to as the online blackmail crime of *sextortion*.

Boys feel more peer pressure to collect the sext images and are more likely to receive sexts than girls. Oftentimes boys will then share the sext images with their friends or even post them online.

According to the FBI, the perpetrators of sextortion employ gaming platforms, social media, and dating and video chat applications to reach their young victims. They use any number of ploys-from pretending to be a romantic interest, giving flattery and attention, offers of money or other items of value, or threats to coerce the child to produce an explicit image. Once the youth has produced or sent a single image or video, the perpetrator will use threats of exposure or other means of coercion to make the child produce more and more images, and even more explicit material.

## **A Discussion about Sexting**

A caring adult today must be proactive. For example, a parent cannot wait for a sexting incident to happen to their child or a child's friend before having an open discussion regarding the dangers of sexting images or distributing them.

Some of the indicators that a young person may be sexting images with a cellphone can include:

- Being secretive, overprotective or anxious about the cellphone or images within it
- Overreacting when a parent or a caring adult picks up the cellphone
- Deleting histories on the cellphone
- Observing that whenever a young person receives a text or is sending a text, the young person will turn their back or will leave the room so they can text in private

Children and teens are understandably reluctant and often embarrassed to disclose any information to their parents regarding sex. Additionally, many young people believe that anything they want to do with their cellphones is strictly their own personal business. That being the case, a discussion about sexting should first begin with a parent clarifying the family rules, expectations and consequences regarding all cellphone usage.

Following that conversation, the parent should initiate a two-way discussion regarding the dangers of sexting images. Start by asking a question such as:

- Has anyone ever sent you a nude photo of a young person? (Follow-up question: What did you do or what would you do?)
- Do you think it's ever ok to forward a nude or sexy image of a young person?

(Follow-up question: Why?)

- Has anyone ever asked you or dared you to send them nude pictures of yourself? (Follow-up question: What would you do or what did you do?)
- What do you think are the consequences of someone taking, sending or forwarding a nude picture of a young person?

Unfortunately, most young people do not seem to understand, nor are they even aware of the fact that producing or distributing nude images of a minor (a person under eighteen years of age), may constitute the serious state or federal crime of child pornography.

A parent should conclude the discussion about sexting images by explaining what the basic conditions of consent, respect and trust are in a healthy and safe relationship.

Reports regarding sexting images can always be made to a local police department. Additionally, the *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* takes reports on online sexual exploitation 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at [www.cybertipline.org](http://www.cybertipline.org).

### **Conclusion**

A parent should not expect the discussion about sexting images to last very long. During the discussion, the parent must always try to remain calm and supportive. Lastly, a parent must try to be respectful of how a child or teen responds during this challenging conversation. It should not only be communicated once, as these types of conversations are best revisited over time.

Technology continues to rapidly change. Parents and all of us who are charged with protecting children must continue our efforts to stay abreast of the many new devices, software programs and the latest apps that may be used by young people and child molesters seeking to manipulate and sexually abuse children.

## **Protecting God's Children for Adults**



Print

## **Modeling Good Behavior Every Day**

By [Paul Ashton, Psy.D., D.Min.](#)

**Let us all remember this: one cannot proclaim the Gospel of Jesus without the tangible witness of one's life.—Pope Francis**

Our work together to protect children is ongoing and never

ending. That is what Love is all about. It is the message of the Gospels and the clear and certain teaching of Jesus: "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19: 14).

For adults, living out the message of Christianity is a way of life. It is not only words, but also actions. It permeates the presence of each person so that what remains after an encounter is reminiscent of the "odor of sanctity," said to have been emitted from the Saints who led lives of extraordinary holiness. For example, after an encounter with another person, our presence, good deeds and kindness leave a pleasant odor behind, and the people we speak to are left feeling good about themselves and their life. When we act in this way, we become "manna personalities" defined as "divinely supplied spiritual nourishment." We feed others through nourishing them with our good words, actions and deeds.

It is a good way to look at how we live—do you leave behind a good odor? Do we feed the people we encounter? Even when we have a difficult duty or obligation to perform, there is always a kinder way to do so. With just a little reflection and thought, we can change the way we affect others. The old song from the 1960's comes to mind: "*They'll Know We are Christians*" by our Love (written by Fr. Peter Scholtes and inspired by John 13:35). Being a witness for our Faith in many ways makes us first responders to the situations we encounter along the way. Protecting children is one of those ways in which we all take part. While we may not always think of the ways in which this happens, the small things that we do make a big difference. Consider the following times you may be protecting children each and every day:

- Following rules, without trying to break them or go around them in places where children and minors gather. This sets a good example and goes a long way in offering kids safe spaces.
- Watching and being alert to the behaviors of other adults when there are gatherings of children, serves to protect youth.
- Listening to the children in your life, attending to the details, being interested in their stories—this form of paying attention gives them confidence in the way they communicate with you.
- Talking to kids about safety rules, modeling good behaviors: putting your seat belt on, respecting the environment, being safe when crossing streets—all lead to good practices for kids to follow.
- Helping children who appear lost and getting them to a safe person in charge, and waiting with them until their parents come forward (lost children in stores, etc.).
- Having another adult present with you when you are in a position of trust

with kids.

- Being the other safe adult for someone who is ministering to children.
- Making sure you don't curse or act inappropriately in the presence of children and within their earshot.
- Speaking positively about the efforts and programs the Church and other groups are undertaking to protect children.
- Supporting child protection efforts by participating and volunteering.
- Educating children, teaching them and being positive in the way you help them.
- Helping parents when they have their arms full of their children, baby carriages and other things.
- Smiling, nodding with understanding and a kind look when a parent is in a tough situation with their kids and trying to manage.
- Reporting any suspicions of inappropriate behaviors of people you know or don't know to the appropriate leadership, and even the authorities.
- Being present, not ignoring others in need.
- Coaching kid's sports.
- Donating money to agencies that support children and families.
- Praying for the safety of all children and vulnerable persons.
- Being involved in family activities where you can show your leadership.
- Acting on the adage, "if you see something, say something."
- Being trained in safe environment programs, first aid classes, emergency drill protocols, etc.

Proclaiming the Gospels isn't left only to those ordained to the priesthood and diaconate. Each person who hears God's word and takes it into their heart and acts on it, does this effectively and boldly no matter how small the gesture may seem. We contribute to the good of the world and the safety of those entrusted to us by being fully alive and present to God working within us. You don't have to be certified in anything to do this.

It is the time of year when schools are coming back into session and children face new experiences and environments. Why not lend a little support by being aware of how we, as individuals and collectively, can make their world happier, safer and brighter?

