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[sbiinternetcrimesagainstchildren@alea.gov](mailto:sbiinternetcrimesagainstchildren@alea.gov)

Sharing photos are a normal part of life either texting or posting them on social media. However, it is important that you do so safely, responsibly and appropriately. Sending and posting of inappropriate photos and videos are considered illegal for teens and tweens. This could lead to some major complications that can either get you in trouble with your parents, your school's administration and law enforcement. Situations such as this could ruin your reputation, create bullying opportunities and may be used to blackmail you. Please think twice before taking, sending, or posting an explicit photo or video of yourself or of someone else because it could jeopardize your future with colleges and/or possible job opportunities. You may believe these images have been deleted but please know they remain accessible.

Please follow these basic tips to avoid any sexting situations and to assist you if involved in a sexting situation.

- 1. NEVER TAKE OR SEND INAPPROPRIATE IMAGES OF YOURSELF:** The safest way to avoid a picture or video getting into the wrong hands or being used against you is to never take or share an inappropriate photo or video of yourself ever. The risk is too great.
- 2. DO NOT REQUEST OR PRESSURE ANYONE TO SHARE INAPPROPRIATE IMAGES:** Simply requesting an inappropriate image can get you in trouble with your school's administration and possibly law enforcement.
- 3. BLOCK INDIVIDUALS WHO REQUEST INAPPROPRIATE IMAGES:** When individuals request explicit images, you should simply ignore or reject their request. It is okay to simply say NO!
- 4. DELETE ANY EXPLICIT IMAGES THAT ARE SENT TO YOU:** Simply having explicit images on your phone of someone underage is illegal and could involve criminal charges.



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5. **DO NOT DISTRIBUTE EXPLICIT IMAGES:** If someone sends you an inappropriate image of themselves or of someone else, do not forward that image to anyone. Delete the images immediately and notify a parent. Forwarding these images could also get you in big trouble with law enforcement.
6. **NEVER EXPOSE YOURSELF TO INDIVIDUALS WHILE ONLINE:** It is common for individuals to pretend to be someone that they are not while online for the purpose of luring someone into a fake relationship to acquire explicit images. These images can be used to blackmail you and force you to keep sending them more images.
7. **INFORM A TRUSTED ADULT:** Talk with a trusted adult if a sexting situation is uncovered to help stop the spread of images or any harassment that could happen based on your involvement.
8. **CONTACT LAW ENFORCEMENT:** In order that they may conduct a thorough investigation and assist you in controlling the spread of such images.

## **Sexting Stories**

Michelle was a 12-year-old seventh grader. She thought that she and her boyfriend, who was also in the seventh grade, were deeply in love with each other. Michelle's story is not much different than most tweens her age who are in love and eager to maintain their relationship. She did not want to lose him. So, she did whatever he requested to make him happy. She thought that this is what she was supposed to do. One day her boyfriend asked her to send him an explicit photo of herself after a month of dating. She initially said no but he said, "If you love me, you will send them, if not, then maybe I should be dating someone else." So, Michelle took a picture of herself in her underwear and sent it in a text message to her boyfriend. She knew it was a bad idea but sent it anyway. The requests did not stop there. He began to request nude photos of her. She reluctantly sent the photos, because she loved her boyfriend and did not want to lose him. Later, her photos began to spread around the school. Michelle began to lose friends and the respect of her teachers. The school administration called her to the office concerning this issue. Her parents were also informed of the incident. Her parents were very embarrassed and disappointed in Michelle. Her boyfriend broke up with her shortly after she sent him the photos. Michelle learned the hard way that this relationship was not based on love but control and manipulation. Once her "boyfriend" received what he wanted he was no longer interested in her. Shane who was a high school senior had a bad breakup with his girlfriend. His friends contacted him one day and requested that he view her Tweeter page. He did and noticed that she had posted a nude photo of him on her page. This was a photo that he sent to her while they were dating. He contacted her and asked that she take it down and she refused. Shane was left with no choice but to contact the police for assistance. His former girlfriend was arrested and charged with the posting of Revenge Pornography. She was charged with a Class A misdemeanor which is punishable by spending up to one year in jail. Shane is having a difficult time finding a job and gaining acceptance into the university of his choice because this explicit photo continues to surface.

## **Risk Blackmail (Sextortion)**

Blackmail or Sextortion is a crime where someone threatens to distribute your private and sensitive material if you do not provide them with explicit images, improper favors and/or money. The predator may also threaten harm towards your friends and family members by using information obtained from your electronic devices unless you comply with their demands. This crime has devastating effects on victims from demographics. These online predators will gain your trust and pretend to be someone that



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they are not. They lurk in chat rooms, social media, and video gaming platforms. Online predators record young men and women who post live-stream explicit images and videos of themselves. They hack into your device and use malware to gain access to your files and control your webcam and microphone without your knowledge. The best way to avoid a situation such as this is to never communicate online with strangers or even individuals who appear to be friends of friends. The profile and image may be deceiving in order to gain your trust. You have absolutely no idea who the individual is behind the computer.

## **Sexual Bullying**

Once a sext enters cyberspace, teens lose control over where that photo may end up. It can be shared copied repeatedly by anyone who receives it. The photo can also be used to bully and/or blackmail you. Among teens and tweens, it is also known as shaming. Their peers make assumptions about their sexual activity and reputation based these explicit photos. Cyberbullies might even share to embarrass and humiliate the victim. They may also use the photo to impersonate the bullied victim which is also referred to as fake profiling.

## **Risky social media and gaming platform sites where predators lurk:**

Roblox, X (formally known as Twitter, Instagram, Snap Chat, Monkey, House Party, Discord, Twitch and Mixer

## **Take these immediate action steps if you suspect a sexting situation:**

- Stop all communication with the predator or cyberbully, do not respond to their messages.
- Block the individual from your phone, email, and social media accounts.
- Inform a trusted adult about your situation.
- Maintain evidence of your situation like dates and times of their request or post.
- Report the incident to law enforcement.

## **Online Reporting Resources**

CyberTipLine.com or 1-800-The-Lost

Cyberblackmail911.com or 1-844-234-2697

## **Parental Guidance Tips**

1. Discover the internet together.
2. Discuss the digital footprint.
3. Discuss the risk of sexting.
4. Be clear with your child about the criminal consequences of sexting.
5. Explain what you expect from your child concerning their digital citizenship.
6. Set rules and regulations concerning your child's online usage and activity.
7. Uphold disciplinary action if your child violates your rules.
8. Make sure that computers, tablets and video gaming devices are in parental view at all times.
9. Be aware of the different sites that your child will use while online.
10. Know your child's online friends and review their online history often.
11. Maintain an open line of communication with your child concerning their online activity.
12. Set up monitoring apps and devices to monitor, control, and prohibit what sites your child visits.
13. Contact your cell phone service provider about information relating to parental control settings.

## **Top Monitoring Applications**

Bark, Qustodio, Norton, Web Watcher, Net Nanny, Kaspersky Safe Kids and Family Time