

## 7. 'Sexting'

'Sexting' is an [increasingly common activity](#) among children and young people where they share inappropriate or explicit images online, through mobile phones or via webcams over the internet. It can also refer to written messages. Young people may also call it 'cybersex', 'sending a nudie, picture or selfie'. 'Sexting' is often seen by some young people as flirting, and there are some who feel that it's a part of normal life.

As a parent, it is important to understand the risks so that you can talk to your child about how to stay safe and what to do if they ever feel scared or uncomfortable. 'Sexting' is more common than we may think and ChildLine have found it to be commonplace amongst children and young people; there was a 28% increase in calls to ChildLine in 2012/13 that mentioned 'sexting' compared to 2011/12.

Most young people do not see 'sexting' as a problem and are reluctant to talk to adults about it because they are afraid of being judged or having their phones taken away. Young people may see 'sexting' as harmless activity but there are risks. Taking, sharing or receiving an image, even voluntarily, can have a long-lasting negative impact.

1. **It's illegal**; by sending an explicit image a young person is producing and distributing child abuse images and risks being prosecuted, even if the picture is taken and shared with their permission.
2. **There is no control** over how the image is shared; it's easy to send a photo or message but the sender cannot call it back, nor do they have any control about how it's passed on.
3. **It rarely stays private**; when images are stored or shared online they become public. They can be deleted on social media or may only last a few seconds on apps like Snap chat, but images can still be saved or copied by others.
4. **Images may never be completely removed** and could be found in the future; for example when applying for jobs, apprenticeships or university; young people should understand that they post on the internet in biro not pencil!
5. **Children are vulnerable to blackmail, bullying and harm**; Young people may have done something in 'fun' with a person they trust, but they have no control over how others might use this data.
6. **Unwanted attention**: images posted online can attract the attention of sex offenders, who know how to search for, collect and modify images.
7. **Emotional distress**: children can feel embarrassed and humiliated. If they are very distressed this could lead to high levels of emotional distress and with that often comes other issues.

The [NSPCC](#) have good advice for parents on this matter, and [ChildLine](#) have a good web page for young people