



# How to Talk to Your Teen About Sexting



## THE CHALLENGE

You have heard that sexting is common among young people. ‘Would *my* teenager do that?’ you may wonder.

You want to discuss the matter with your child—but how? Before answering, consider why some young people have become involved in sexting and why you should be concerned.\*

\* “Sexting” refers to the act of sending sexually explicit messages, photos, or videos via cell phone. For more information, go to the [jw.org](http://www.jw.org) Web site and read the online article “Young People Ask—What Should I Know About Sexting?”—Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > TEENAGERS.



## WHY IT HAPPENS

- Some teenagers send sexually explicit messages **to flirt** with someone they like.
- In other cases, a girl sends an explicit photo of herself **because she is pressured** by a boy to do so.
- Sometimes a boy will mass forward an explicit photo of a girl either **to entertain** his friends or **to retaliate** after a breakup.

Whatever the cause, a teenager armed with a cell phone can get into a lot of trouble. “In the click of a button,” says the book *CyberSafe*, “lives are changed forever.”

Many people fail to realize that once a photo goes into cyberspace, the sender loses control over how the photo will be used. In one case, reports a bulletin from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), an 18-year-old girl “committed suicide after a nude photo she had transmitted via her cell phone to her boyfriend also was sent to hundreds of teenagers in her school. Other students, who apparently continued to forward the image, allegedly harassed the girl.”

Sexting also raises legal issues. In some places, for example, minors who have sent sexually explicit images to other minors have been charged with child-pornography offenses and have been required to register as sex offenders. As a parent, you too can be held liable if your name is on the cell-phone contract or if you fail to take measures to prevent your child from sexting.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Set clear rules.** Although you cannot fully control your teenager's cell-phone use, you *can* make sure that he or she knows your rules—as well as the consequences for breaking those rules. Remember, too, that as a parent, you have the right to monitor your teenager's cell phone. —*Bible principle: Ephesians 6:1.*

**Help your teenager to reason on the problem.** You could say: “There are many opinions as to what constitutes sexting. How would you define the term?” “What kinds of photos do you think are inappropriate?” “In some places the law considers a minor who sends a nude photo of a minor to be guilty of a crime. Do you

## Think beyond the send button

think it's that bad?” “Why would sexting be morally wrong?” Listen carefully to his or her reasoning, and help your teenager to think beyond the send button. —*Bible principle: Hebrews 5:14.*

**Present hypothetical scenarios.** You could say to your daughter: “Suppose a girl is being pressured by a boy to ‘sex’ him. What should she do? Give in so that she does not lose the friendship? Refuse the request but flirt with him anyway? End the relationship? Tell an adult?” Help your daughter to reason on the matter. Of course, you can use a similar approach with a son.—*Bible principle: Galatians 6:7.*

**Appeal to your teenager's sense of goodness.** Ask questions such as these: How important to you is a good reputation? What traits do you want to be known for? How would you feel about yourself if you humiliated someone by forwarding an inappropriate picture? How would you feel if you took a stand for what is right? Help your teen to “hold a good conscience.”—1 Peter 3:16.

**Set the example yourself.** The Bible says that godly wisdom is chaste and free from hypocrisy. (James 3:17) Do your values reflect those words? “We need to set good examples ourselves and not view images and Web sites that could be viewed as unsavory or illegal,” says the book *CyberSafe*. ■

## KEY SCRIPTURES

“Children, be obedient to your parents.”—Ephesians 6:1.

“Mature people . . . have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish both right and wrong.” —Hebrews 5:14.

“Whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap.”—Galatians 6:7.

## SUGGESTION

If talking about sexting will be awkward for you or your teen, you might try this approach:

First, have your teen talk about what *others* are doing. Then say: “I’ve heard a lot about sexting. Is this practice common?”

Next, find out how he or she feels about what others are doing. You could ask: “Do you think people grasp the consequences of sexting?”

Then, discuss what your teenager would do. Respond by saying: “Let’s talk about what you should do if you receive an explicit text.”

**Tip:** You could use a news report to start a discussion. For example: “I read about a girl whose explicit photo was forwarded all over her school. Does this kind of thing really happen?”