

# KEEPING KIDS SAFE

A PARENTS' GUIDE

The Archdiocese of Washington is dedicated to promoting and ensuring the protection of all children. This flier is one in a series produced by the archdiocese to help parents better understand how to protect their children from victimization, both inside and outside the home. This guide is to help you better understand the increasingly popular trend of "sexting" among teens on their cell phones.

## How can I monitor my child's cell phone use?

One program, called My Mobile Watchdog ([mymobilewatchdog.org](http://mymobilewatchdog.org)) allows parents and guardians to monitor all calls from and to the cell phone as well as text messages, e-mails, and picture messages. Parents can log into a website to view these communications and also set up a preapproved list of numbers that can be called from or can call into the phone.

There are other programs available so read reviews of them and explore your options before purchasing one and talk to your cell phone provider about ways they can help you monitor your child's cell phone use.

*Information from  
[www.Netsmartz411.org](http://www.Netsmartz411.org)*

## New trend more than just harmless fun

**sexting (v):** the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photos electronically, primarily between cell phones.

Have you checked your teen's cell phone lately to see the text messages he or she has been sending and receiving? If not, you might want to. A new trend - "sexting" - has been making news across the country as more and more teens are being caught by teachers and parents using their cell phones to send their boyfriends, girlfriends, classmates and even strangers nude or semi-nude photos of themselves and others. Sometimes the photos are accompanied by sexually explicit messages.

Teens may think their parents and teachers take "sexting" too seriously—that it's just harmless flirting, or that they sent the messages as a joke. But saying the suggestive text was sent as a joke misses the point. It is morally wrong, even illegal. The authorities can bring a charge of distributing child pornography, even if your teen is sending others pictures of him or herself.

In January 2009, three 13-year-old Pennsylvania girls were charged with child pornography after texting semi-nude photos of themselves to three male classmates. In October 2008, a Texas eighth-grader spent the night in a juvenile detention center after his football coach found an explicit picture on his cell phone that a fellow student sent him. In May 2009, Maryland Governor Martin O' Malley signed tougher penalties for the possession of child pornography -- a measure that could cover "sexting."

Also, teens may not realize that the pictures they are sending to one or two people are often forwarded to others, causing at best humiliation for the subject of the photos and at worst, ending up online being looked at by sexual predators.



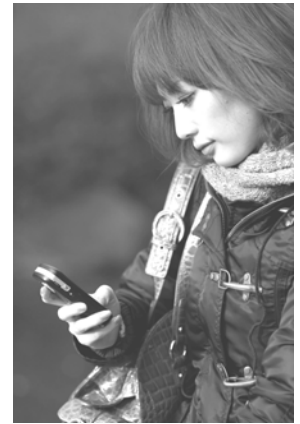
Learn more about the Archdiocese of Washington's commitment to protecting children at [www.adw.org](http://www.adw.org).

Click on "Protecting Our Children"

Office of Child Protection Services • 301-853-5328



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### Talk to your child about appropriate cell phone use

- Use a discussion about sexting to reinforce moral teaching on sexuality, healthy self-esteem and respect for self and others.
- Set clear expectations for using the cell phone. For example:
  - Tell your child who he or she may communicate with and when he or she may use the cell phone
  - No taking photos of anyone who is not fully dressed or is engaged in inappropriate behavior
  - No sending or forwarding of suggestive text messages
  - If your child receives a text that makes him or her uncomfortable, he or she must tell you right away
- Explain the consequences of misusing the cell phone for sexting, bullying or anything else inappropriate. Most teens with phones can't stand the thought of having that privilege taken away!
- Talk to your child's teacher and/or principal about how prevalent the problem is at school and what steps they are taking to try and prevent it. Make it clear that if your child is involved in any misuse of his or her cell phone at school that you want to be notified immediately.
- Remind your child that what they send using their cell phone may not remain private. The messages they send could get passed around, which may cause them a lot of humiliation.
- Let your child know he or she can come to you if they receive a text message that makes them uncomfortable. If your child can determine who sent the message, contact school administrators to let them know what's going on.
- Make sure your child understands that it is unlawful to send sexually explicit photos of minors via cell phones and online. Even if your child thinks of it as a joke and something "everyone is doing," your child can be charged with possession and distribution of child pornography.
- Purchase a phone that does not allow text messaging, does not have a camera and cannot connect to the internet. If you only want your child to have a phone for safety purposes, their phone does not need to have any of these features, which usually bump up the cost of the phone.

### By the numbers

According to a recent study of teens age 13-19, **20 percent** have sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos or videos of themselves.

#### Who are they sending it to and why?

**71 percent** of teen girls have sent or posted this content to a boy or girl

**51 percent** of teen girls say they do it because of pressure from a guy

**66 percent** of teen girls and **60 percent** of teen boys do it to be "fun or flirtatious"

**44 percent** of teen girls and boys say did it in response to content they received

#### How does this impact teens?

**44 percent** of teen girls say that it is common for these images to be shared people not intended to see it

**29 percent** of teens say that exchanging explicit content makes them feel "expected" to date or hook up