



One minute guide

'Sexting' - Youth Produced Sexual Imagery

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What is 'Sexting'?

'Sexting' is when someone shares sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others. These images can be sent using mobiles, tablets, smartphones, laptops, and any device that allows someone to share electronic media and messages. Photos and videos can be shared as text messages, emails, posted on social media or increasingly via mobile messaging apps, such as Snapchat, WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger.

Whilst many practitioners use the term 'sexting', [recent literature](#) recommends the use of the term: 'Youth Produced Sexual Imagery (YPSI)' when it relates to the activity of children and young people. This terminology encompasses the following:

A child under the age of 18 creating and sharing sexual imagery of themselves with a peer under the age of 18;

A child under the age of 18 sharing sexual imagery created by another person under the age of 18 with a peer under the age of 18 or an adult; and

A child under the age of 18 in possession of sexual imagery created by another child under the age of 18.

How much of a problem is this and what does the law say about it?

Many children and young people use the internet safely and do not send or share sexual imagery. However a 2016 NSPCC/OCC study found that over 1 in 10 boys and girls had taken topless pictures of themselves and 3% had taken fully naked photos. Of those who had taken images, 55% had shared them with others and 31% had shared them with someone they did not know.

The ease and speed of how children and young people can produce and share sexual self-imagery can be problematic, particularly as sharing sexual images may lead to them becoming vulnerable to bullying, embarrassment and sexual exploitation, particularly if the images are shared with others by the recipient.

Making, possessing and distributing any imagery of someone under the age of 18 which is 'indecent' (usually involving nudity or sexual poses) is illegal. This includes imagery of the young person themselves if they are under 18. The National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) has made clear that YPSI (shared between young people) should primarily be treated as a safeguarding issue. However, where the police have been notified of YPSI being shared between young people, they are obliged to record this as a crime having occurred.

Whilst a young person may have broken the law, the Police are able to show discretion in their response. Every crime recorded by the police has to be assigned an outcome code. In January 2016, the Home Office launched the outcome code 21 to assist the Police to formalise this discretion when handling youth produced sexual imagery. This means that even though a young person has broken the law and the Police could provide evidence that they have done so, the Police can record that they chose not to take further action as it was not in the public interest to do so.

What should practitioners and others do?

Practitioners should take up opportunities for training, advice and guidance about YPSI and wider related issues such as peer on peer abuse, healthy relationships and consent.

The Leeds Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) ([guide](#)) deliver 'Light Bite' sessions to increase practitioner awareness and understanding of: Harmful Sexual Behaviour; Consent & Adolescent Relationships; and Sexting.

If practitioners are concerned about an incident of YPSI they should firstly discuss their concerns with the safeguarding lead within their agency. Safeguarding and child protection procedures should be followed as usual.

School staff and Safer Schools Officers should refer to the '[Sexting' Guidance](#) published in 2017 by the UKCCIS regarding initial response, investigation and interventions for young people creating and sharing YPSI.

This guidance includes advice about when referrals to Children's Social Work Service and the Police are required and the circumstances in which a decision not to refer might be made in cases when the Designated Safeguarding Lead is confident that they have enough information to assess the risks to pupils involved and that the risks can be managed within the school's pastoral support and disciplinary framework.

Young people who require support should be encouraged to discuss any concerns regarding YPSI with a trusted adult such as a teacher, child protection lead, or police officer. They can also contact [Child Line](#).

Parents and carers should be supported and encouraged to discuss concerns with child protection leads in education settings or by approaching other practitioners working with them. They could also ring the Contact Centre (see below).

Key contacts or for more information

Practitioners can contact the Children's Services Peer on Peer Abuse Coordinator on tel: 0113 3952882

Practitioners can also contact Duty and Advice ([guide](#)) (including Early Help tel: 0113 3760336. Out of hours – Children's Emergency Duty Team tel: 0113 3760469 ([guide](#)))

Members of the Public can ring the Contact Centre on tel: 0113 2224403

Children and young people can seek advice and support from Childline tel: 0844 892 0240 and from their [website](#)

For more information, you can read the guidance, [Sexting in Schools and Colleges: Responding to incidents and safeguarding young people](#)

You can find information on the LSCB website. This includes information aimed at [children and young people](#) including the 'Think before you send' campaign and a page for [parents and carers](#).

And there is also a page aimed at practitioners which includes '[Think before you send' campaign resources](#) that can be downloaded.