

## **Sexting and Cyber-bullying Can Damage College and Career Opportunities**

Students have power at their fingertips. Every picture posted or status updated, every comment or “like,” can be public and permanent. Students’ poor decisions can lead to problems involving harassment, intimidation, and bullying as well as sending and receiving inappropriate pictures and text.

### **What is sexting?**

Sending sexually explicit text or photographs from mobile devices—sexting—can have serious legal and psychological consequences. Whether shared voluntarily or through coercion, the photos can be used to bully, harass, intimidate, or embarrass victims online or via mobile devices. Photos shared between boyfriends and girlfriends are often forwarded and shared with friends and classmates. In minutes, one photo can reach thousands of people via websites and mobile devices. Sexting can be a felony. Some teens who have sent or received explicit pictures have been charged with possession of child pornography. If convicted, your teen could be labeled as a sex offender for the rest of his or her life.

### **How to prevent sexting? (National Crime Prevention Council)**

- Use recent news stories as “teachable moments” to talk with your teen about your guidelines for safe Internet, cell phone, and social media behavior.
- Encourage your teen to think before he or she sends or posts pictures and personal information. Every post is an electronic fingerprint that can damage his or her future college and career opportunities and reputation with friends, family, and neighbors.
- Remind your teen that healthy relationships should be based on mutual respect. Stress that no one should pressure her or him into sending explicit pictures.

### **How to respond if sexting has occurred? (National Crime Prevention Council)**

- If your student confesses to sending or forwarding nude pictures, stay calm and take action. Tell him or her to stop immediately and delete all such files. Explain the risks and consequences of the behavior.
- If an inappropriate photo is forwarded without your student’s permission, consider talking to the teen or parents of the teen forwarding the photos. If necessary, report the situation to local law enforcement or school administrators and be mindful of the potential criminal consequences.
- Get help if you suspect your teen has been a victim of sexting. Talk with local victim service providers to get the right support for him or her.

### **What is cyber-bullying?**

Students are turning to cyberspace to harass peers. Cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm (e.g. harassing, humiliating, or threatening text or images) inflicted through the Internet or phones.

### **What are cyber-bullying tactics?**

- Posting or sending cruel gossip to damage a person's reputation and relationships with friends, family, and acquaintances
- Deliberately excluding someone from an online group
- Breaking into someone's e-mail or online account and sending messages to cause embarrassment or damage to the person's reputation and his or her relationships with others
- Posting or sending offensive, insulting, and/or intimidating messages that may include threats
- Tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information that is then shared online

### **What are some facts about teens and cyber-bullying? (www.dosomething.org)**

1. 43% have been bullied online, 25% more than once.
2. 58% admit someone has said hurtful things to them online. More than 40% say it has happened more than once.
3. 70% report seeing frequent bullying online.
4. Over 80% use a cell phone regularly, making it the most common medium for cyber-bullying.
5. 68% agree cyber-bullying is a serious problem.
6. 81% think bullying online is easier to get away with than bullying in person.
7. 90% say they have ignored social-media bullying. 84% have seen others tell cyber-bullies to stop.
8. Only 1 in 10 victims inform a parent or trusted adult of the abuse.
9. Girls are about twice as likely as boys to be victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying.
10. Bullying victims are 2 to 9 times more likely to consider committing suicide.