Sexting refers to the sending of provocative or sexual photos, messages or videos, generally using a mobile phone. It can also include posting this type of material online.

While sharing suggestive images or text messages may seem like innocent flirting or be amusing for many young people, sexting can have serious social and legal consequences.

Young people sometimes willingly share images of themselves, naked. However, sexting can also happen in response to peer pressure.

Sexting can have unforeseen consequences. For example, a 15 year old girl takes a topless photo of herself and sends it to her boyfriend’s mobile phone, at his request. After their relationship ends, the boy posts the photo with unflattering comments on a social networking site for friends to see.

Images taken without the person’s knowledge or consent and forwarded on to others can also be considered sexting.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Sexting has legal implications which should be taken seriously. Under Australian law, young people may be committing a crime when taking, receiving or forwarding sexual images of themselves or friends who are minors. This applies even if all participants are willing.

These acts can represent the production or distribution of child pornography.

**SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Once images and messages are sent they can often spread rapidly. If images are posted online it can almost be impossible to remove them or to control access to them.

As a result, sexting can cause embarrassment both now and in the future. Family, friends, future partners and employers may have access to sexting images and messages, which can damage your child’s or teen’s reputation.

Sexting can also lead to cyberbullying, sexual harassment or at its most extreme, assault.

To remain safe, young people need to consider how they deal with their own, and others’, messages and images. It can be easy for them to forget the potential impact of their actions in an online environment.

**TIPS FOR PARENTS**

- **Warn your child** about the social and legal consequences of sexting.
- **Remind them to think before they act**—taking or sending sexual images, even of themselves, has social implications and may be illegal.
- **Remind your child to delete** any sexual content they receive from others and to avoid forwarding this type of content.
- **Remind your child to consider** the feelings of others when distributing any content by mobile phone or online.
- **Learn how to use your child’s mobile phone** and talk with them about what they can and can’t do with it.
- **If you are concerned** that a sexting incident may be a criminal matter, contact your local police.