

Staying Safe While Staying Connected

facts and tips for teens



Text, tweet, IM, e-mail, blog, post . . . between cell phones and computers you can stay in touch with anyone, anytime, anywhere. But staying connected has its risks. Posting or sending sexual photos, messages, or videos—what’s come to be called “sexting”—can lead to trouble that can last for years after the message or post is sent.

Why Sexting Isn't Smart

During my freshman year this one guy started talking to me. He started asking me for naked pictures, I thought it was normal so I sent one thinking he would delete it. He ended up sending to everyone in the school.

Ali, 18, posted on
<http://www.athinline.org/>

The Internet is forever.

Messages and posts are things you can never take back. Many Internet sites keep records of everything posted, and may share that information with other people including the police and potential employers. And there’s nothing you can do to control copies that may have been downloaded or forwarded by other parties.

People forward things.

Nearly half of all teens who receive “sexts” forward them on to someone else, and 15% of teens say that they’ve had private chats made public. Messages or pictures you meant for just one person could end up anywhere and be seen by anyone.

People can get hurt.

Sexting can literally ruin people's lives. When sexual messages or pictures reach other people—including family members, schoolmates, coworkers, or potential bosses—they can lead to broken friendships, getting kicked out of school, losing a job, losing a scholarship, or worse.

The guy I lost my virginity to secretly taped us on his webcam and I wasn't told until a couple months later when all of his friends asked me how it felt to be the mini porn star of our small town school. I don't know what to do, he doesn't know I know.

Casidy, 17, posted on <http://www.athinline.org/>

It's illegal.

All across the country, states are passing laws against posting or sending messages meant to hurt, insult, or spread nasty rumors about another person—including sexts. And posting or sending sexual pictures of anyone under the age of 17, even yourself, may be considered child pornography in the eyes of the law. In Pennsylvania and Florida, for example, teens who “sexted” naked pictures of each other were actually arrested for felony child pornography! Even if a sext didn't start with you, there may be legal consequences for forwarding someone else's sexts.



Tips for Staying Safe

Protect your identity.

Your passwords are the only thing standing between you and a *lot* of potential trouble. Fourteen percent of teens say that they've had their online identities stolen by someone else. So even if you can't imagine a friend using your account to do something nasty, keep your password private. And pick something other people can't easily guess. Avoid obvious things like your birthday or your pet's name.

Another way to protect your identity—and your safety—is to be careful about what you share online or in texts.

Sexual predators are expert at poking around social networking sites like FaceBook to find new targets. Avoid posting detailed personal information like your full name, phone number, address, or school name, and don't post details about where you are going or what you are doing.

Know who you're "talking" to.

Let's face it, there's no way to be sure WHO you're talking to on the Web. Passwords get stolen, friends "borrow" each other's accounts, and people just plain lie. Six out of ten teens say they've chatted online with someone who was probably lying about who they were, and 7 out of 10 say they've gotten messages from people they didn't know, including requests for personal information. Be smart and be safe. Never agree to an in-person meeting with someone you only know through the Internet. It can be dangerous and even deadly.

Think before you send.

Think about the consequences before you send a sexy picture or sexual message. Think about some of the places the message could end up. How would you feel if everyone at school saw it? What would your friends and family think? Keep in mind that the message or image could end up anywhere, and that you won't be able to take it back.

Be true to yourself.

More than half of teen girls (and about one in five guys) say that they've felt pressured to sext a girlfriend of boyfriend. Keep in mind that no one has the right to force you to do anything sexual.

*One of my friends went on myspace and found her picture in her account with a **** shoved in her face. I found out my other friend did it so I logged into his myspace and i did the same thing to him.*

Josh, 13, posted on <http://www.athinline.org/>

I met this guy over the Internet and he gave me his number. We start talking and that question pops up: "Can I see a naked pic of you?" I thought that me and him were in love and I did it. He said if you love me you will do it.

Anonymous, 14, posted on <http://www.athinline.org/>

Want to know more?

Check out MTV's A Thin Line Web site (<http://www.athinline.org/>) for tips, advice, and more real stories from real teens.

Recommended Citation: Child Sexual Abuse Collaborative Group, National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2010). *Staying safe while staying connected: Facts and tips for teens*. Los Angeles, CA, & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Copyright: Copyright © 2010 National Center for Child Traumatic Stress on behalf of the Child Sexual Abuse Collaborative Group, National Child Traumatic Stress Network. This work was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which retains for itself and others acting on its behalf a nonexclusive, irrevocable worldwide license to reproduce, prepare derivative works, and distribute this work by or on behalf of the Government. All other rights are reserved by the copyright holder(s).

National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Established by Congress in 2000, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is a unique collaboration of academic and community-based service centers whose mission is to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for traumatized children and their families across the United States. Combining knowledge of child development, expertise in the full range of child traumatic experiences, and attention to cultural perspectives, the NCTSN serves as a national resource for developing and disseminating evidence-based interventions, trauma-informed services, and public and professional education.