

Safety Card: A Focus on Sexting for Foster Carers

Ineqe Group Limited are a company who specialise in safeguarding and child protection. They recently published the following advice on how to talk to young people about the dangers of sexting and what to do if this has happened to them. Further advice on this topic can be found on the foster and adoptive carers website at

<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/fanotts/safer-caring/internet-safety>



Sexting has been defined as “*the creating, sharing, and forwarding of sexually suggestive nude, or nearly nude images*” (Lenhart, 2009). In simple terms this means taking a sexually explicit photograph and texting (sharing) it via your mobile phone to others.

Foster carers, parents and carers of very young children should not have to worry about this issue but as children grow up they will be influenced as much, if not more, by their friends as by their parents or carers. People in the public eye, people they look up to and people they want to be like can also have a powerful influence on them.

It is never too early to invest in positive conversations with your foster child and it is always good to reassure them that no matter what happens they can always come to you for help.



The innocent actions of the young can very often lead to risk. A nine-year-old taking a picture of his seven-year-old sister playfully dancing in her underwear is innocent. However, when shared online by others and placed in the context of a site containing graphic sexualised images visited by paedophiles - the innocence is lost.

Sexually explicit content can easily be distributed between people, through the use of smartphones, the Internet and through online social networking sites.



The Law



The law makes it an offence to take or share an indecent image of a child under 18. Therefore, a child who takes an image of themselves and shares it technically commits a criminal offence.

The law dealing with these issues was not actually designed for this purpose. It was created and the age parameters set to deal with adult perpetrators who exploit children and young people. Many become involved in sexting at a time in their lives when they've become curious and begun to explore their sexuality.

It is important to avoid criminalising children. Placing consensual sharing of images between young people in the context of a safeguarding response is key.

The fact is, Police will not want to prosecute children who have made a simple error of judgment. They have a mechanism called Outcome 21 which allows them to sensibly deal with crime recording related to this sensitive issue.

However, the mere fact that an incident may be investigated causes children to worry and could be a deterrent to them coming forward. So please reassure them that everyone including the police will simply want to safeguard and support them.

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) have recently published non-statutory guidance on managing these issues and we include access to it below.



Recent Studies

Recent studies claim that up to 39% of teens and 59% of young adults have sexted at least once.



A leading UK children's charity the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) state that they receive almost one call everyday where during which children mention sexting.



“Most young people do not see sexting as a problem and are reluctant to talk to adults about it because they are afraid of being judged or having their phones taken away”.

Channel 4 News and the NSPCC worked together for six months speaking to children aged 13-16 throughout the UK and the results are concerning:

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*“I get asked for naked pictures... at least two or three times a week”
stated a 15-year-old girl. She continued, “You would have seen a girl’s breasts
before you’ve seen their face”.*

Whilst adults risk embarrassment if a photo they have sent to another adult is posted or shared with a wider audience the implications for children are much greater.

Children and young people need to understand the dangers that sexting can



pose. Images can be shared privately by text, Messenger, WhatsApp, ooVoo and a range of other apps. They can be posed to social media sites such as Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram. Most social media sites have strict policies that prohibit nude photographs however, they are also clear in stating that they are ‘reactive’. They **DO NOT** proactively monitor all content that is posted on their platforms.

These sites rely on users to report anything that may be a breach of their terms and conditions. When an image, especially a nude image is reported, social media sites normally will and most definitely should remove the content immediately.



Some sites will also block for a limited period the user that has posted the content. When an inappropriate image has been posted online, it is really important that the image is reported as soon as possible.




The quicker an inappropriate image is reported, the easier it is for those working in the Internet industry to take the image off their site and to do what they can to prevent or stop it spreading further.



When you talk to your foster child about this issue, **BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT YOU SAY**, and how you say it. Telling a child or young person that once an image goes online, it stays online might seem like a strong message that will deter them from doing something risky but this is not always the case. That type of message can be detrimental to a child's health and wellbeing as they may think there is no point in seeking help, as they've been told nothing can be done.



Always think about the consequences of what you say and never take away hope that something can in fact be done to help. Every time you get the chance reinforce that fact the sooner they tell you they've made a mistake, the sooner you can help them and very often **IT CAN BE FIXED**.

In many cases early intervention by parents, carers, teachers or police officers can prevent an image that a child has shared via text or WhatsApp from going into wider circulation. Furthermore, sites like Facebook,  Twitter and Google can often remove explicit images of children and young people or prevent the images spreading further. In some cases, they can make it much more difficult for 'reported' images to be found.

The key is EARLY reporting and EARLY intervention.

Sexting can leave children and young people susceptible to online bullying, blackmail, grooming, unwanted attention and emotional stress. Once a predator tricks a child into sharing an image, a common tactic is to get them to share more images of a progressively intimate nature by threatening that if they don't, then the predator will share what they already have. This creates a destructive cycle that can only be broken by the offender being caught or the child coming forward.



The pressure on a child in these circumstances can lead to serious mental health issues caused by the fear of what might happen, leading to depression and a desperation that drives young people to self-harm or even to contemplate suicide. So don't overreact, be sensitive and supportive. Some children will obviously need immediate help, they may self-harm, attempt or

threaten suicide. However even in the case were the child appears to be managing well always seek help from professionals like your Doctor.

As a foster parent, don't be afraid to talk to your child about sexting. Explain the risks that accompany sending intimate or inappropriate photos to other people.

This is not just about people who children engage with online, who they don't really know as it can also and often apply to images they have willingly shared with their boyfriend or girlfriend.

It may be helpful to use real-life examples.

If there has been an incident in the news, use this as a time to ask your foster child how they would feel if that was one of their friends? Prompt a conversation by asking what they could have done and allow your foster child to feel confident that they can talk to you if they ever face something similar.

Useful Links

[UKCCIS | Sexting in Schools and Colleges](#)

[NSPCC | Sexting](#)

[Thinkuknow | Has your child shared a nude selfie?](#)

[UK Safer Internet Centre | A Parents Guide to Dealing with Sexting](#)

[UK Safer Internet Centre | Nude selfies what parents/carers need to know](#)

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