

**The development of technology has drastically changed how children communicate. Phone calls and face to face conversations have been replaced with more impersonal text messages and postings to social networking sites. While most children use technology responsibly, electronic forms of communication have created new issues for parents and school personnel to deal with: sexting, cyberbullying and textual misconduct.**



## Teens and Technology

- 65% of 12–17 year olds have a profile on a social networking site.<sup>1</sup>
- 91% of all social networking teens use the sites to keep in contact with friends they see regularly.<sup>1</sup>
- About 2/3 of teens own cell phones, sending an average of 440 texts every week—with 25% sent during class.<sup>2</sup>

## Sexting

- 9% of teens have sent a nude or semi-nude picture of themselves; 17% have received such a picture, and 3% have forwarded one.<sup>3</sup>
- 20% of teens have electronically sent nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves.<sup>4</sup>
- Teens ages 17–18 are more likely than younger children to send or receive sexts, but one study found sexting started as early as age 9.<sup>5</sup>

## Cyberbully and Textual Misconduct

- 39% of teens have sent or posted sexually suggestive messages.<sup>3</sup>
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, up to 35% of young people have received an offensive, threatening or harassing email or text message.
- Youth are far more likely to be harmed by peers or the consequences of their own online behavior than by adult criminals on-line.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pew Internet & American Life Project

<sup>2</sup> Common Sense Media; [www.common Sense Media.org](http://www.common Sense Media.org)

<sup>3</sup> Cox Communications Teen Online & Wireless Safety Survey, in Partnership with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and John Walsh. Conducted by Harris Interactive (May 2009)

<sup>4</sup> The National Campaign To Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, [www.thenationalcampaign.org](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org)

<sup>5</sup> Lipkins, S., Levy, J.M., and Jerabkova, B. (2009) Sexting...Is it all About Power? [Realpsychology.com](http://Realpsychology.com)

<sup>6</sup> Online Safety 3.0; [www.connectsafely.org](http://www.connectsafely.org)

## Someone is waiting to listen and to help.

For more information contact the center in your area.

**CONTACT Rape Crisis Center**

Huntington

304-399-1111

1-866-399-RAPE (7273)

**Family Refuge Center**

Lewisburg

304-645-6334

**REACH**

**Family Counseling Connection**

Charleston

304-340-3676

**Hope, Inc.**

Fairmont

304-367-1100

**RDVIC**

Morgantown

304-292-5100

**Sexual Assault Help Center**

Wheeling

304-234-1783 / 304-234-8519 / 800-884-7242

**Shenandoah Women's Center**

Martinsburg

304-263-8292 / 304-725-7080 / 304-258-1078

**Women's Aid In Crisis**

Elkins

1-800-339-1185

**Women's Resource Center**

Bekley

304-255-2559 / TTY 1-888-825-7836

Or

**The National Sexual Assault Hotline**

1-800-656-HOPE



**West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information and Services, Inc.**

[www.fris.org](http://www.fris.org)

# Teens, Tweens & Technology



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# Sexting



The sending of nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves—sexting—is an increasing misuse of cell phones by teens and even tweens. Because they know more about using technology than they do about the potential legal and social consequences of sexting, teens send out what they consider to be a flirtatious or provocative picture. Although intended for one person, it can end up posted to the Internet and shared around school.

The receivers of the pictures equally fail to recognize the potential consequences of having and sharing the material and freely forward the images to their friends.

Because the distribution of nude pictures of minors can violate child pornography laws, teens across the country are being

arrested for both sending nude pictures and for receiving those sext messages. West Virginia statutes have not been tested in court, but they do not specifically state that the laws apply to adults only.

West Virginia code states, in part, that:

## **§61-8C-2 b. Use of minors in filming sexually explicit conduct prohibited; penalty.**

Any person convicted of photographing or filming a minor engaging in any sexually explicit conduct shall be guilty of a felony and can be fined up to \$10,000 and/or imprisoned for up to 10 years.

## **§61-8C-3. Distribution and exhibiting of material depicting minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct prohibited; penalty.**

Any person who, with knowledge, sends or causes to be sent, or distributes, exhibits, possesses or displays or transports any material visually portraying a minor engaged in any sexually explicit conduct is guilty of a felony, and, upon conviction thereof, shall be imprisoned in the penitentiary, not more than two years, and fined not more than two thousand (\$2,000) dollars.

Additionally, under section **§61-8A-5**, if someone 18 or older assists a minor (under 18) in producing obscene matter—knowing that the person is under 18, upon conviction they can be fined up to \$50,000 and/or imprisoned for up to 10 years.

# What Teens, Tweens and Parents Can Do

## **Teens and Tweens:**

- Never respond to the message.
- Never forward the message.
- Report the receipt of the message to a trusted adult.

## **Parents:**

- Get all of the facts before you act.
- Save or print the message as a record, if involving law enforcement. Then, with their permission, delete it from the phone or computer.
- Contact your wireless provider about how to block messages.
- Change your phone number and/or email address.
- Most social networking sites have a “Help” tab. Clicking this will direct you to the information needed to report abuses.
- Set rules for your child’s use of cell phones and monitor the use.
- Learn the school’s rules about the use of cell phones and other electronic devices. Support and reinforce these with your child.
- Talk to your child about both the short term and long term consequences of the misuse of technology— including how information/pictures shared electronically can never be retrieved and the possible response of the legal system of sending and receiving sext messages.
- If your child is the recipient of a sext message or a target of cyberbullying, do not take away their phone privileges. Be supportive and help them work through the situation rather than punishing them for someone else’s misconduct.
- Call the police if the situation involves someone threatening, stalking or harassing, refusing to delete inappropriate material, committing a hate crime, or using a picture as child pornography.



# Cyberbullying and Textual Misconduct

Unsupervised access and decreased inhibitions, coupled with not knowing how an electronic message is received, all contribute to the growing problem of ‘textual misconduct’. Without any filters (school-yard bystanders, teachers, parents, a fully developed sense of social conscience) to stop them, cyberbullies are texting hurtful messages, posting embarrassing comments on social networking sites, and sending unflattering pictures of their targeted victims to their classmates.

Studies do not agree on the prevalence of online harassment of minors—with estimates of children effected by cyberbullying, varying from 4–46%. Some research indicates that offline bullying is equally prevalent, with 42% of cyberbully victims reporting to also be bullied at school. (Hinduja and Patchin 2009)

Research also shows that offline bullying decreases after 6th grade, while cyberbullying is less often school-related, peaks in 6th–8th grades, but often persists through high school and even into college. Since over half of the victims of cyberbullying reported having been negatively impacted in some way, the behaviors need to be addressed to prevent self-harming behaviors, interference with school success, and an escalation of the bullying behaviors.

## **What Educators Can Do:**

- Thoroughly investigate all incidents of textual misconduct.
- Enlist the help of law enforcement if the incident involves a possible safety threat.
- Develop a response that is commensurate with the harm done.
- Work with parents to convey the school’s intolerance of these behaviors.
- Instruct parents to contact an attorney, since they may have other legal recourses.
- Contact cell phone providers if threats or explicit content are transmitted.
- Keep all evidence of cyberbullying through screenshots and messages if disciplinary actions are planned.
- Contact and work with MySpace, Facebook or other sites where the bullying occurred to assist in removing content and gathering evidence.
- Use creative punishments for minor forms of cyberbullying, such as having students create anti-cyberbullying posters or make brief presentations to younger students about the responsible use of technology.

(Source: Responding to Cyberbullying, Top Ten Tips for Educators; Hinduja, Sameer and Patchin, Justin; Cyberbullying Research Center)