

# Digital Sharing - Family Tip Sheet

Empowering families to make safe, smart, and ethical decisions online.

## Sexting & Nude Photographs

Although there are very real, serious consequences associated with sexting, it's important to also focus on the motivations behind it and the risks associated with the behavior. Understanding the phenomenon can help us prevent kids from using poor judgment and engaging in self-destructive behavior. Sexting is increasingly prevalent among kids — no longer something we can assume only happens to other families. Yet, it also confuses and angers many parents who can't imagine digitally sharing something so intimate.

- **Remind your kids that sexting has long-lasting consequences. It's important to communicate that sexting can hurt everyone involved.** In many states, sending nude photographs is illegal — particularly when minors are involved. Taking, possessing, or distributing naked images of minors can have significant legal consequences for the sender and the recipient. Second, many schools have consequences that may range from suspension to expulsion. Students themselves may feel pressure to change schools after such pictures get out, as the social ramifications can be devastating.
- **Remind kids that any private messages can be made public online.** Even if your kids insist that they completely trust the recipient, once they press send, they lose control of the message.

Send me a nudie? ;)...

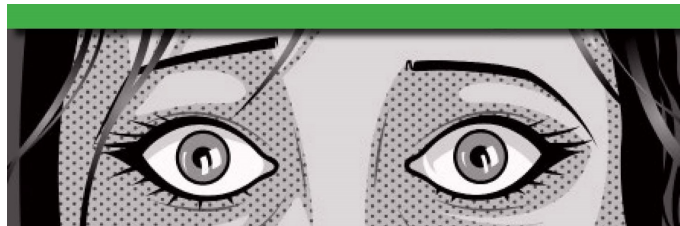
Promise not to share?

*Help kids think through the "what-ifs":*

- A recipient loses his or her phone
- a friend scrolls through another's messages
- a parent checks a kid's phone
- the recipient changes his or her mind;
- the relationship circumstances change.

Any message, snap or photo can be copied, screenshot, or forwarded. Sexts can be used for bragging rights or even for revenge. Emphasize that there are just too many real risks that they can't control.

- **Explain to your kids that sexting is not a normal or common behavior.** Boys tend to believe that other boys are readily receiving sexts from their female peers. Kids also may be tempted to engage in sexting because they desperately want to experience and "prove" their closeness with others — and they are still learning how to navigate these close relationships and express their feelings appropriately. Explain that it's normal to want to show someone that you care about them but there are far less risky ways to do it than sending a sext. And anyone who asks for one does not have your best interests at heart.



## Digital Footprints and Photo Sharing

Today's social media makes photo sharing easy. Kids love to follow friends' photos, share casual moments visually, and simply stay in touch. However, kids don't always think through what they post. Photos they thought were private can easily go public.

- **Set boundaries together.** Discuss your family's values and expectations around photo sharing. Photos that show illegal behavior (underage drinking or texting while driving) are clearly a no-go. But agreeing where to draw the line on certain other photos — like photos of your daughter in her bikini or your son making a rude gesture — may pose a challenge. Start by discussing the possible consequences of these types of images. How will they affect your kids' reputation? Remind them that once they post a photo online, it's out of their control — such photos could be seen by a friend's parent, a college admissions counselor, or a future employer. Online content is easily searchable, often ends up where not intended, can be easily taken out of context, is permanent, and it can resurface at any time.
- **Encourage your kid to talk face-to-face with a person who posts an unflattering photo.** Online photo sharing is a part of our world today, and opting out is unlikely. Even if your kids choose not to share photos online, their friends might upload photos of them. But it can be difficult to ask others not to post or to take down photographs. It may be helpful to have the conversation offline, face-to-face, so that it doesn't end up further perpetuating a digital problem.

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## Digital Drama

When it comes to discussing social media, it's important that adults and kids speak the same language. What grown-ups think of "cyberbullying" might be explained away by kids as "digital drama." But it's not trivial. Digital drama brews in the offline world and simmers online when kids feel emboldened to say or do things that they wouldn't face-to-face. Checking in with kids and observing them as they interact with technology can ensure your conversations are productive and helpful.

- **Ask how they are ... then ask again.** It may seem simple, but ask your kids how they are doing on a daily basis. Also, watch for telltale signs that they are suffering from digital drama — a change in mood or behavior — as your kids interact with their phone and other devices. They may be absorbing subtle social messages in not-so-healthy ways.
- **Hit the pause button.** If your child is on the receiving end of someone else's hurtful online behavior, encourage him to "take it offline." It may be tempting to continue the conversation online; however, face-to-face can be more constructive. The lack of body language, facial expressions, and tone with online communication easily can lead to misunderstandings. Encourage kids to "walk in another's shoes" to make sure that they are considering all perspectives. At the very least, "taking it offline" will give your child time to process how to act - rather than just react.
- **Read between the lines.** With the popularity of photo sharing, kids often receive evidence that they were not included ... which then leads to feelings of exclusion. Imagine your child seeing a photo of friends at dinner and realizing that she was not invited. While it is true that no one is included in everything, it is a hard rite of passage for kids to learn. Unfortunately, some kids use online photos to intentionally tag the kids who weren't invited — a not-so-subtle message of exclusion. In these cases, let your children know that they are supported, and talk about strategies to mend a riff or dispel a fight.

Learn more about digital citizenship for your teen at University of Wisconsin-Extension, Buffalo County at [www.buffalo.uwex.edu](http://www.buffalo.uwex.edu)

## Selfie Culture

- **Take the pulse on their posting.** It's easy to watch the way kids pose and pout in front of the camera and panic that their behaviors are a sign of narcissism or self-absorption. But before you jump to any conclusions, consider asking your kids the following questions and listening earnestly to their responses: (1) Why do you like taking selfies? (2) What makes for a selfie that you like? Which selfies don't you like? (3) How do you decide which selfies to share? Where and how will you share a selfie? (4) What do your friends normally do or say when you post a selfie? Have you ever gotten a reaction that you weren't expecting? By taking the pulse on your kids' posting, you can determine whether or not their selfies are really something to worry about and tailor your responses accordingly. If the image they're projecting is concerning to you, explain why.



- **Clarify family expectations.** Selfies are just one kind of photograph that kids take and share, but they can serve as a useful opportunity to dive into a conversation about digital footprints and what images kids should and shouldn't share online. Are there specific activities that they should never photograph? When you clarify your expectations, you help kids think through potentially sticky situations before they arise — rather than after an image has already gone viral.
- **Encourage critical consumption.** We know that kids are impacted by the content they see on their newsfeeds, but you can help by encouraging them to be critical consumers. Debunk the notion that everyone always looks as perfect and happy in person as they do on social media. Encourage a critical eye with respect to what they see online.