



## **Dealing with Incidents of Sexting**

### **SEXTING - Steps to take when dealing with an incident of sexting**

#### Definition of 'sexting'

There are a number of definitions of sexting but for the purposes of this advice sexting is simply defined as images or videos generated:

- by children under the age of 18, or
- of children under the age of 18 that are of a sexual nature or are indecent. These images are shared between young people and/or adults via a mobile phone, handheld device or website with people they may not even know.

There are many different types of sexting and it is likely that no two cases will be the same. It is necessary to carefully consider each case on its own merit. It is important to apply a consistent approach when dealing with an incident to help protect yourself, the school and the child. The range of contributory factors in each case also needs to be considered in order to determine an appropriate and proportionate response. All staff should be familiar with this policy.

#### **Steps to take in the case of an incident**

##### **STEP 1: Disclosure by a child**

Sexting disclosures should follow our normal safeguarding practices. A child is likely to be very distressed, especially if the image has been circulated widely and if they don't know who has shared it, seen it or where it has ended up. They will need support during the disclosure and after the event. They may even need immediate protection or a referral to social services.

The following questions will help decide upon the best course of action:

- Is the child disclosing about themselves receiving an image, sending an image or sharing an image?
- What sort of image is it? Is it potentially illegal or is it inappropriate?
- Is the school's Safeguarding Policy and practices being followed? For example, is the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) on hand and is their advice and support available?
- How widely has the image been shared and is the device in their possession?
- Is it a school device or a personal device?
- Does the child need immediate support and/or protection?

- Are there other children and/or young people involved?
- Do they know where the image has ended up?

This situation will need to be handled very sensitively. Whatever the nature of the incident, ensure the school Safeguarding and On-line Safety policies and practices are adhered to.

## **STEP 2: Searching a device – what are the rules?**

In a school-based context, it is highly likely that the image will have been created and potentially shared through mobile devices. It may be that the image is not on one single device: it may be on a website or on a multitude of devices; it may be on either a school-owned or personal device. It is important to establish the location of the image but be aware that this may be distressing for the young person involved, so be conscious of the support they may need.

The revised Education Act 2011 brought to bear significant new powers and freedoms for teachers and schools. Essentially, the Act gives schools and/or teachers the power to seize and search an electronic device if they think there is good reason for doing so.

A device can be examined, confiscated and securely stored if there is reason to believe it contains indecent images or extreme pornography.

- When searching a mobile device, the following conditions should apply:
  - The action is in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and On-line Safety policies
  - The search is conducted by the Head Teacher or a person authorised by them
  - The DSL or a deputy is present
  - The search is conducted by a member of the same sex
  - If any illegal images of a child are found, you should consider whether to inform the police. Any conduct involving, or possibly involving, the knowledge or participation of adults should always be referred to the police. If an "experimental" incident is not referred to the police, the reasons for this should be recorded in writing. Always put the child first.
  - Do not search the device if this will cause additional stress to the child/person whose image has been distributed.

Never:

- Search a mobile device even in response to an allegation or disclosure if this is likely to cause additional stress to the child UNLESS there is clear evidence to suggest that there is an immediate problem
- Print out any material for evidence

- Move any material from one storage device to another

Always:

- Inform the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Record the incident
- Act in accordance with school Safeguarding Policy and procedures
- Inform relevant colleagues/senior management team about the alleged incident before searching a device

If there is an indecent image of a child on a website or a social networking site, then you should report the image to the site hosting it.

Under normal circumstances you would follow the reporting procedures on the respective website; however, in the case of a sexting incident involving a child or young person where you feel that they may be at risk of abuse, then you should report the incident directly to CEOP [www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-report](http://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-report), so that law enforcement can make an assessment, expedite the case with the relevant provider and ensure that appropriate action is taken to safeguard the child.

### **STEP 3 - What to do and not do with the image.**

If the image has been shared across a personal mobile device:

Always:

- Confiscate and secure the device(s)

Never:

- View the image unless there is a clear reason to do so (see above)
- Send, share, copy or save the image anywhere
- Allow children to do any of the above

If the image has been shared across a school network, a website or a social network:

Always:

- Block the network to all users and isolate the image

Never:

- Send, share, copy or save the image
- Move the material from one place to another
- View the image outside of the protocols in the school's Safeguarding Policy and procedures.

#### **STEP 4 - Who should deal with the incident?**

Often, the first port of call for a child is a class teacher. Whoever the initial disclosure is made to must act in accordance with the school's Safeguarding Policy, ensuring that the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a deputy DSL are involved in dealing with the incident. The DSL should always record the incident using the school's Safeguarding Concerns Form and also log the incident in the school's On-line Safety log. There may be instances where the image needs to be viewed and this should be done in accordance with protocols. The best interests of the child should always come first; if viewing the image is likely to cause additional stress, professionals should make a judgement about whether or not it is appropriate to do so.

#### **STEP 5 - Deciding on a response**

There may be a multitude of reasons why a child has engaged in sexting – it may be a romantic/sexual exploration scenario or it may be due to coercion. It is important to remember that it won't always be appropriate to inform the police; this will depend on the nature of the incident. However, as a school it is important that incidents are consistently recorded. It may also be necessary to assist the young person in removing the image from a website or elsewhere.

Always:

- Act in accordance with the school's Safeguarding Policy
- Store the device securely
- Carry out a risk assessment in relation to the child
- Make a referral to the LADO Lynn Griffiths (01642 726004), if needed
- Contact the police (if appropriate)
- Put the necessary safeguards in place for the child, e.g. they may need counselling support, immediate protection and parents **must** also be informed.
- Inform parents and/or carers about the incident and how it is being managed.

#### **STEP 6 - Contacting other agencies (making a referral)**

If the nature of the incident is high-risk, consider contacting your local children's social care team. Depending on the nature of the incident and the response, you

may also consider contacting your local police or referring the incident to CEOP.  
[www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)